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A MEDITATION ON THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

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Whoever lets loose a sunbeam in this world starts a benediction among men. Whoever sets a little lamp where its beam may shine on even a few feet of some one's path has done that which is worth while. God made the sunbeam, and the candle was lighted a great while ago; but if in my little book I can bring the light nearer to some who will be blessed and cheered by it, that will be enough.

J. R. M.

Philadelphia.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:

He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; for thou art with me:

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

With staff and shoon I journey,
And still before mine eyes
The Lord who goes before me
Holds up a radiant prize.
And though I faint and falter,
I yet shall overcome,
And win with saints and angels
The endless rest at home.

MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

IT is worthy of our thought how much poorer the world would be if the little Twenty-third Psalm had never been written. Think what a ministry this psalm has had these three thousand years, as it has gone up and down the world, singing itself into men's hearts, and breathing its quiet peace into their spirits. How many sorrows has it comforted! How many tears has it dried! How many pilgrims has it lighted through life's dark valleys! Perhaps no other single portion of the Bible — not even the fourteenth of St. John's Gospel — is read so often or has so wrought itself into religious experience. It is the children's psalm, — to many the first

words of Holy Scripture learned at a mother's knee. Then, it is the old people's psalm; oft-times, with quivering voice, it is repeated by aged saints as the night comes on. Then, all the years between youth and old age, this psalm is read. It is the psalm of the sick-room; how many sufferers have been quieted and comforted by its words of assurance and peace! It is the psalm for the death-bed; scarcely ever does a Christian die, but these sweet words are said or sung. Thousands of times it has been repeated by dying Christians themselves, especially the words about the valley of the shadow of death, as they passed into the valley. It is the psalm for the funeral service, read countless times beside the coffin where a Christian sleeps in peace.

I cannot think of anything in all the list of the world's achievements that I would rather have done than write the Twenty-third Psalm. To compose any sweet hymn that lives, and sings itself into people's hearts, giving cheer, comfort, or hope, making men and women stronger, truer, and braver, is a noble privilege. It is a great thing to have written "Rock of Ages, cleft for me," "Jesus, Lover of my soul," or "Nearer, my God, to thee;" but, of all hymns which have been born into this world, I think I would rather

have written David's Shepherd's Psalm. I would rather be the author of this little song than be the builder of the pyramids. Earth's noblest, divinest achievement is to start songs in the world's wintry air, to sing into its weary hearts something of heaven's music. Not many of us will be permitted to write a twenty-third psalm to bless men with its strains of sweet peace; but we may at least make our life a song, a sweet hymn of peace, whose music shall gladden, comfort, and cheer weary pilgrims as they pass along life's rough ways.

It is interesting to think of the origin of this psalm. At first thought, we might say it was written in David's youth, when he was a shepherd at Bethlehem. It is full of images and pictures of shepherd life, which might seem to fix its date in the author's early years. But further thought will show that the psalm does not belong to this period. It could not have been written by a young man. It tells of struggles and toils, of pain and sorrow endured, of dark valleys passed through. It is a psalm of experience, — an old man's experience, after being led through many a trying way and tasting many a bitter cup. It must have been written in David's old age, but in it he enshrines the memories of his youth.

We get a practical suggestion: the experiences

of the early years make the remembrances of life's later years. The visions of youth become the faiths and the songs of ripened manhood. If you would have an old age made sweet by memory, fill your youth-time with deeds of virtue, bravery, and beauty, and with dreams of purity and peace. Old age is the harvest of all the years gone before.

"The Lord is my shepherd." Homely name for God, you would say — Shepherd. There is a story of a great artist who had been entertained in some old castle, where he received much kindness. As he was about to go away, he wished to leave behind him some token of his gratitude. He could find no canvas on which to put a picture; but taking a common bed-sheet, the only available thing, he painted on it an exquisite picture, which he left in his room. So on this homely, commonplace word, shepherd, did David paint a matchless picture of God, putting into it all that he had learned of God during his lifetime, and leaving it as a memorial in the world. No more unpoetic name could have been chosen; and yet a thousand years later, Jesus Christ, when he would leave with his disciples a revelation of his love and care for his own, called himself by the same homely name, Shepherd — the Good Shepherd; and we all remember what pre-

cious thoughts he fixed upon this name. "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." "When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. . . . I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me."

In our country we have no shepherds such as those who tend the flocks in the East. There the pasture fields are wide, unfenced, stretching for miles and miles. There will be patches of grass here and there, and then bald barren tracts glowing in the hot sun, broken by deep ravines, dark and desolate, where wild beasts have their lairs. In such a region sheep unshepherded would soon be lost. But one never sees a flock in that country without its shepherd.

It was this picture that was in David's mind when he wrote this Twenty-third Psalm, — a mingling of beauty and danger. But as in the Syrian wilderness the shepherd appeared everywhere with his flock, so in life's wilderness there is always One whose presence is an assurance of safety and of blessing.

The Syrian shepherd loves his flock, and lives with them. He leads them out by day to find the patches of green pasture. By night he watches

them, guarding them against prowling wild beasts and against robbers. Ofttimes he is wounded in defending them. When one sheep wanders, he leaves the flock, and seeks the lost one until he finds it. When one faints by the way, he gathers it in his arms, and carries it in his bosom. As we study the ways of the Eastern shepherd, we begin to see the beauty of the picture which the homely name gives to God who is our Shepherd.

"The Lord is my shepherd." Little words are sometimes very important. Suppose you read it thus, "The Lord is a shepherd;" would it mean just the same to you? The name shepherd carries in itself all its wondrous revealing of love, tenderness, care, safety, providence, as a picture of God; but what comfort is all this to you, so long as you cannot say, "The Lord is *my* shepherd"? Some poor children, passing a beautiful home, with its wealth and luxury, may admire it, and say, "What a lovely home!" But how much more it means to the children who dwell inside, who say, as they enjoy the good things in the house, "This is our home!" It makes a great difference to me whether a good man is a worthy friend, or is my friend; whether God is a Father, or is my Father; whether Jesus is a wonderful Saviour, or is my Saviour; whether the Lord is a Shepherd, or is my Shepherd.

The little pronoun "my" is the golden link which binds all this blessed revealing to me and makes it all mine own. The old preachers talked much about appropriating faith — that is, the faith which makes Christ and all the blessings of redemption our own. Jesus would be the Shepherd of every man. He invites all into his fold. He opens the gates to all. He gave his life for the world, and made redemption for all men. Appropriating faith claims the blessing for itself, accepts it, and makes it its own. It is a joyous moment when we can say, "Christ is mine, and I am his;" "The Lord is my shepherd."

It was not the exclusive privilege of David to say, "The Lord is my shepherd." It is our privilege too. Religion is an individual matter. Each one comes to Christ for himself, and it is a personal relation which is established between Christ and each believing soul. Every one has all of Christ for his own, just as truly as if he were the only believer. Each one can say, "The Lord is *my* shepherd. He maketh *me* to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth *me* beside the still waters. He restoreth *my* soul." If we can say this little word my with our heart, as we go over this psalm, claiming all of God for our own, then have we learned the great lesson which binds us to God and God to us. This is the faith that saves. It

is not only taking Christ and all the blessings of his redemption for our own; it is also the surrender of our life, with all its powers and affections, to him. It means infinite blessing from God; but it means also unquestioning obedience, implicit following, the losing of our life in Christ.

Wonderful is the first assurance of this psalm: "I shall not want." We need not try to define or limit this word. We need not say that it includes only spiritual wants. Do you think our Shepherd would provide for the wants of our soul, and then pay no heed to our common, daily physical needs? The assurance means that all our wants will be supplied, — the wants of our body and the wants of our soul. St. Paul puts the same assurance into very strong words in one of his epistles: "My God shall fulfil every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." The same promise is written over and over again in the Bible. We have it in one glorious sentence of the Master's, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." We need have only one care, that we put the first thing first, — faithfulness to God. Then all else we need for both worlds will be supplied.

Yet we must make sure that we do not fail in our part. God will never fail us; but we forget,

sometimes, in our rejoicing over such an assurance, that we must fulfil our part if we would claim the divine promise. It will not always be easy. To-morrow it may mean a distasteful task, a disagreeable duty, a costly sacrifice for one who does not seem worthy. Life is full of sore testings of our willingness to follow the Good Shepherd. We have not the slightest right to claim this assurance, unless we have taken Christ as the guide of our life.

We must notice here, too, the grounds of David's confidence. He was very rich in his old age, when he wrote this psalm; but he does not say, "I have much goods laid up, vast sums of gold, and therefore I shall not want." He was a great king and a mighty conqueror. Nation after nation had submitted to him, and now the whole Eastern country was at his feet, with its power and wealth; but he does not say, "I am king of vast realms; many peoples own my sway; the resources of great countries are at my disposal, and therefore I shall not want." His confidence was in something securer than money or power. "The Lord is my shepherd, and therefore I shall not want." To have God is better than to have all the world without God. "The world passeth away," "but the word of God abideth forever." When we can say, "God is mine," we have all the wealth of the

universe for ours; for "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and what is God's is ours. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's." Blessed are all who can say, "The Lord is my shepherd." They can sing then with confidence, "Therefore I shall not want."

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." This is a picture of peace. The flock has been fed; and now in the heat of the day the shepherd leads his sheep into the shelter, and makes them lie down in the soft, lush grass, by the edge of the rippling streams, to rest awhile.

This suggests the rest into which our Good Shepherd leads his flock. Life is not all toil. God gives us many quiet resting-places in our pilgrim way. Night is one of these, when, after the day's toil, struggle, and exhaustion, we are led aside, and the curtains are drawn to shut out the noise, and he giveth his beloved sleep, in sleep giving the wonderful blessings of renewal. The Sabbath is another of these quiet resting-places. God would have us drop our worldly tasks, and have a day for the refreshing of both body and soul. It is a sore loss when for any reason one has to miss his Sabbath rest. Few things in the life of to-day are sadder than the encroachments of the world's bustle, strife, and care upon Sabbath

quiet and peace. Friendship's trysts are also quiet resting-places, where heart may commune with heart, where Jesus comes, too, unseen, and gives his blessing. All ordinances of Christian worship — seasons of prayer and devotion, hours of communion with God — are quiet resting-places.

Far more than we are apt to realize do we need these silent times in our busy life, needing them all the more the busier the life may be. Mary sat at Jesus' feet, and found green pastures and still waters there, and grew into marvellous sweetness of life and spirit. John lived near the heart of the Master; and abiding in that quiet resting-place, he went out with shining face, and became a transfigured disciple. We all need more quiet rest in God's green pastures. We would be better Christians if we had more such rest as these words suggest.

We may notice the form of the words: "He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures." Sometimes we are unwilling to rest. The world draws on our hearts, and we would go on in its ambitions without resting at God's feet. Even some Christian people are so busy with their work or with their pleasure, that they do not get time to pray, or even to sit down for a quiet half-hour with the Bible. They do not realize, in thus depriving themselves of the privilege of communion with

God, that they are starving their souls, laboring only for the meat that perisheth. Then sometimes God *makes* them lie down to rest a while, that they may be renewed in spirit. Loving them too much to encourage their worldly absorption, he compels them to go aside to get the quiet that they so much need. It may be in a sick-room. It is not pleasant, not agreeable, and sometimes they chafe and repine. But they would better accept the Shepherd's guidance, even when it leads them into the darkened chamber of pain, for there they will find green pastures. We always may be sure of this. Whenever the Good Shepherd makes us lie down, there is blessing for us; and if we submit and trust, we shall be enriched in our spiritual life, and prepared for better service afterward.

A young Christian who had been for many weeks in a hospital, undergoing a painful operation and then slowly recovering, wrote me in the days of her convalescence, "I have found my little white bed here in the hospital a bit of God's green pasture." Not only had it proved a place of rest and peace to her, but also a place of spiritual refreshment.

"He restoreth my soul." In several ways does the shepherd restore his sheep. If one wanders away, he goes out after it, and seeks it till he finds

it, restoring it to the shelter of the fold. If one faints and grows sick by the way, in the hard journey or the burning heat, the shepherd does not leave it to die, but takes it up in his arms, and carries it home, restoring it to the fold. If a sheep is hurt, torn by a wild beast or injured by accident, the shepherd tends its wounds until they are healed.

All this suggests how our Good Shepherd restores our souls. Sometimes we wander away. It is very easy to drift off from Christ. The drifting is often unconscious — we do not know that we are losing our first love, our interest in prayer, our conscientiousness in obedience and service, and by and by we are far off. Sometimes it is a cherished sin which eats out our heart-life. Sometimes it is a worldly companionship that draws us away, loosening the bonds which bound us to Christ. Sometimes it is an absorbing business which leaves no room for God. Or it may be the cares of this world which choke the word and quench the Spirit. We need often to have our soul restored, quickened, revived, or we should never get safe home through this evil world.

Then, what soul is not sometimes hurt, wounded, torn, — perhaps by sorrow, perhaps by the wild beasts of temptation? We all know how the Good Shepherd restores the hurt life. He is a

most skilful physician. He binds up the broken spirit. Sin's wounds he heals. We remember how David's own soul was restored after he had fallen. The terrible hurts were so healed that he was a better man afterward than he had been before. Sin is a fearful thing. It wounds the soul, and no hand but Christ's can restore it. But if we put our hurt life into his hand, he will give healing. What millions of sin's woundings our Good Shepherd has cured!

Then, when sorrow has left the heart broken, it is only the Good Shepherd who can restore it. We may put all sorrow's wounds into his hand. He is most gentle, and his hand is infinitely skilful. He is a wonderful comforter. No human hand can heal a heart that is bruised, but the hand of Jesus has infinite delicacy and skill.

> "The broken wing of the swallow
> He binds in the middle air."

"He restoreth my soul." The end of all Christ's restorings will be the putting back of the defaced divine image on the life of every one who trusts in him and follows him. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God's work in us is not yet finished while we stay in this world. "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him."

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The Eastern shepherd does not drive his sheep — he leads them; he goes before them, and they follow him. He always has a purpose in his leading. He knows where the bits of green pasture are, and he would lead his flock to these. The way may be rough, but it is the right way to the pasture. "Paths of righteousness" may not be straight paths; but they are paths that lead somewhere — to the right place. Many desert paths are illusive. They start out clear and plain, but soon they are lost in the sands. They go nowhere. But the paths of righteousness have a goal to which they unerringly lead.

It is one of the sweetest revealings of Christian life that the Good Shepherd always leads his own. He does not drive them. We are not his sheep if we do not follow him. He putteth forth the sheep, and goeth before them. He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. In many ways does he lead. The mother gives the first divine guidance to the little child that looks up into her face with love and trust. Then, along the years, other hands are reached out to guide. We do not know how much of God's goodness comes to us in human hearts and lives. Sometimes it is a friend's wise counsel

that you find just the word which makes the way plain for you. Sometimes the guidance comes in a sermon or in a book. Or it may be in some simple experience of every-day life. A young man in great perplexity picked up a scrap of an old newspaper which he found on the street, and on it read words that made his way clear to him. Or the leading comes in a gentle friendship, with its quiet influence, or in a providence which makes duty very plain. In some way, at least, our Shepherd will always lead us if we are willing to be led. The trouble too often is, not in trying to learn the way we should take, but in unwillingness to go as our Good Shepherd would lead us. We chafe and resist, and refuse to follow. We must be willing and obedient if we would have the divine guidance. We must trust God's wisdom rather than our own. We must commit our way to him with absolute confidence and unquestioning faith, following his guidance cheerfully, sweetly, wherever he may take us.

"He chose this path for thee,
Though well he knew sharp thorns would pierce thy feet,
Knew how the brambles would obstruct the way,
Knew all the hidden dangers thou wouldst meet,
Knew how thy faith would falter day by day;
And still the whisper echoed, 'Yes, I see
This path is best for thee.'

He chose this path for thee;
What needst thou more? This sweeter truth to know,
That all along these strange, bewildering ways,
O'er rocky steeps and where dark rivers flow,
His loving arms will bear thee all the days.
A few steps more, and thou thyself shalt see
This path is best for thee."

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." No doubt these words have lighted more souls into the valley of death than any other one verse in the whole Bible. I shall attempt no explanation of them; they need none. Exposition only mars their beauty.

Probably the valley of the shadow of death is, more correctly, the valley of deep darkness. One who is familiar with the country in which the Psalms were written readily understands the picture which was in the writer's mind. Some of the valleys or gorges are so deep as to be almost utterly dark. It is necessary oftimes to lead the sheep through these gorges to get them to some bit of sweet pasture which lies beyond. Not only was there dreary gloom in these narrow valleys, but often in their dark sides wild beasts had their lairs. Thus they would become indeed valleys of the shadow of death for the sheep, were it not for the presence of the shepherd. These

gorges fitly represent every dreary and perilous way through which God's children may have to pass — most fitly of all, the way of death, through which every believer must go to reach heaven's blessed pasture lands which lie beyond.

The presence of the shepherd took away all fear from the sheep. He carried both rod and staff, — the rod, a heavy club to defend the sheep against enemies; and the staff, a stick to lean upon, and to use also in lifting up any of his sheep or lambs which might fall into peril. These instruments of defence and help comforted the sheep by assuring them that their shepherd would fight their battles, and bring them safely through.

Sometimes God's sheep, in their experience in this world, must pass through just such deep, dark valleys; and yet they need not be afraid, the Shepherd is with them. Not only is he with them, but he is able and willing to defend them against all enemies, as well as to guide and help them through. This assurance comforts them. The presence of the Shepherd takes away all fear.

Life is full of illustrations. A child cries out in the night in terror. It is afraid in the darkness. The mother speaks, thus revealing her presence; and the child is comforted, and in a moment sleeps in peace. A timid one is afraid to go through some gloomy way. One brave and strong

and unafraid, says, "I will go with you; and all fear vanishes, and the timid heart becomes bold. A poor woman in a London hospital was told that she must undergo a painful operation. She was asked if she was willing to submit to it. After a moment's hesitation, she said, "Yes, I can endure it if Lady Augusta Stanley will sit by me and hold my hand." "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

We know how the presence of a strong, tried, trusted friend comforts us in any place of loneliness or danger. Were you ever in a strange city, where, amid all the throngs on the streets you saw no face you had ever seen before, none in which you perceived any token of recognition? You were oppressed by a dreadful sense of loneliness. Then suddenly you met a friend, one you had known long, and in whom you had confidence. What a sense of comfort this friend's presence gave you! Instantly your feeling of loneliness vanished. You were no longer afraid. This is the comfort which is described in the wonderful words of this psalm: "I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

An old Scotch shepherd found much comfort, when dying, in the words of his pastor, who said, "Don't you know that sometimes, when you were driving the sheep through the valleys, there

would be shadows all about you, while there was bright sunshine on the hills above? You are in the shadows now, but there's sunshine on beyond." "Oh! that is good," said the shepherd. "I never saw it that way before. 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.' Over yonder on the heavenly hilltops the sun is shining."

Shadows here, but sunshine beyond. That is the meaning of the valley. Only for a moment shadow, mystery, strangeness, and we are walking *through* it, — and then light, glory, home, Christ's face, — forever with the Lord. Let no believer ever be afraid. Even in the darkness, or what seems from this side, as we enter, to be darkness, we shall find our great Companion.

"Thou art with me, with rod and staff, and I shall be comforted." We need not be afraid in the valley; for Jesus will be with us, and he has all power and all grace. He has overcome the world; and in his hands are the nail-prints, reminding us both of his victory in fighting our battles, and his love in giving himself for us.

When Dr. Charles Hodge was on his deathbed, he repeated over and over again a hymn which Mrs. Weiss, daughter of Archbishop Whately, wrote during her last sickness. Two stanzas of the hymn run thus: —

"Dearest Saviour, go not from me;
Let thy presence still abide:
Look in tenderest love upon me —
I am sheltering at thy side,
Dearest Saviour,
Who for suffering sinners died.

Both mine arms are clasped about thee,
And my head is on thy breast;
For my weary soul has found thee
Such a perfect, perfect rest.
Dearest Saviour,
Now I know that I am blest."

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." We are usually told that the shepherd figure is dropped, and another scene introduced, at this point in the psalm. But Dr. George Adam Smith tells us that there is no need to cut the psalm in two in this way. The last two verses, he says, are as pastoral as the first four. "If these show us the shepherd with his sheep upon the pastures, those follow him, shepherd still, to where in his tent he dispenses the desert's hospitality to some poor fugitive from blood." The shepherd's tent in the wilderness was a little sanctuary, where the hunted man was sure of shelter, where "every wanderer, whatever his character or his past might be, was received as a 'guest of God,' — such is the beautiful name which they still give him, — furnished with food, and kept in-

violable, his host becoming responsible for his safety."

It was this custom, Dr. Smith thinks, which was in the writer's mind when he composed the last two verses of the psalm. "Thou spreadest before me a table in the very midst of my enemies." We need more than shepherd care; we need also mercy and grace. Sin and its curse drive us into the wilderness. Our past is full of enemies who haunt us — the sins we have committed. Our own heart contains relentless foes of God, who give us no rest. Satan watches ever to destroy us.

But there is a place of refuge from all these pursuing foes. According to the above interpretation, the shepherd's tent is a picture of the cross, a place of shelter for the sinner hunted by his sins. We must not forget that it was the Shepherd himself who died on the cross for us. "The good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." We have in the cross not only a place of refuge within which no enemies can pursue us, but under its shadow we have also divine hospitality. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." A man fleeing from a storm ran under a great tree. There he found shelter. But he found also fruits which the storm had brought down from the tree, — food for his hunger, and a

spring of sweet, pure water, at which he quenched his thirst. So in the shadow of the cross the friend of Christ finds not only refuge from all enemies, but also provision for all his wants.

Not from our sins only, but from all danger of whatever kind do we have shelter in Christ. The picture of the table spread in the wilderness in the presence of enemies is true of the believer in every sense. As the guest of God he is safe from every foe. St. Paul puts it in very strong words in the eighth of Romans: "If God is for us, who is against us? . . . Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

"Thou anointest my head with oil." Anointing the head was one of the tokens of hospitality in the East. Jesus reminded Simon that he had failed as host in the honors shown to him as

guest: "My head with oil thou didst not anoint." Such anointing was the highest mark of respect that could be paid. Only the most distinguished guests were thus honored. When David uses these words here he means that he had been treated by the Lord as a most highly honored guest.

It seems strange to human reason that the God of heaven should so lavish his love and kindness upon sinners of a mortal race. We are apt to regard such words as exaggerations. But the Bible abounds in expressions of the same character. When the prodigal was about to return to his father, he said that he would ask for a servant's place because he was not worthy to be called a son. Yet when he reached home he was received, not as a servant, but as a son. Jesus said, "I call you not servants, . . . I have called you friends." The beloved disciple exclaimed, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are." No words can describe the honor and the blessedness of him who has become God's child by receiving Jesus Christ. The best things of divine grace and glory are his. Being a child of God, he is also an heir, an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ. It is past comprehension, this wonderful loving-kind

ness of God that takes us in all our unworthiness, brings us into closest divine fellowship, and puts upon us the highest honors of the universe.

"Not worthy, Lord, to gather up the crumbs
With trembling hand that from thy table fall,
A weary, heavy-laden sinner comes
To plead thy promise, and obey thy call.

I am not worthy to be thought thy child,
Nor sit the last and lowest at thy board;
Too long a wanderer and too oft beguiled,
I only ask one reconciling word.

. . . . . .

I hear thy voice; thou bid'st me come and rest;
I come, I kneel, I clasp thy pierced feet;
Thou bid'st me take my place, a welcome guest,
Among thy saints, and of thy banquet eat.

My praise can only breathe itself in prayer,
My prayer can only lose itself in thee;
Dwell thou forever in my heart, and there,
Lord, let me sup with thee; sup thou with me."

We may think of anointing also as an emblem of spiritual blessing. Oil was a symbol of the grace of God. Jesus was anointed at his baptism, and went forth full of grace and truth. If we yield ourselves to God, we, too, shall receive a heavenly anointing. Then we shall be filled with God. The beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon us. Our faces shall shine with the shining of holy peace. Our words shall have in them

divine sweetness and grace. Anointed for God, our life shall be a benediction to every one it touches. Our shadow, as we pass along the streets, shall bless those on whom it falls. We shall be God's saving health in this world, diffusing the influences of heaven amid human sorrow and sin.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This reads like a line out of an angel's life in heaven. "Goodness and mercy . . . all the days." Can that mean here, in this world? What! in the life of toil, disappointment, loss, sorrow, and tears, which we must all live on earth? Surely this must be only a poet's dream of life. No; it is the life of faith and trust in this world. Toil, trouble, trial, belong to life as men see it, but in faith's realm this is the picture always — "Goodness and mercy all the days." Even in sorrow and loss there is goodness, — always there is mercy. Thus it is unto the end, and then — "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

"There come new cares and sorrows
Every year.
The ghosts of dead loves haunt us,
The ghosts of changed friends taunt us.
And disappointments daunt us
Every year.

Too true! Life's shores are shifting
Every year;
And we are seaward drifting
Every year;
Old places changing fret us,
The living more forget us,
There are fewer to regret us
Every year.

But the truer life draws nigher
Every year:
And its morning star climbs higher
Every year;
Earth's hold on us grows slighter,
And the heavy burthen lighter,
And the dawn immortal brighter,
Every year."

The ending of the story of this life of blessedness is not in this world; it is in heaven. Whether David's thought reached over into the eternal home, we cannot surely tell. The truth of immortality was not understood then as it is now. We have fuller revelation, and we know that the believer shall indeed dwell in the house of the Lord forever. We have the finishing of the picture in the book of The Revelation. "Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon

them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

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